

## SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 71

By Harper

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Mr. Emmett Edwards of Nashville.

WHEREAS, it was with great sorrow and a profound sense of loss that the members of this General Assembly and the citizens of our State learned of the passing of Emmett Artway Edwards, a gentleman of the highest honor and integrity; and

WHEREAS, a soft-spoken, humble gentleman, public servant, and businessman who was a friend, advisor and confidant to governors, legislators, mayors, members of Congress, and a former Vice President of the United States, Emmett Artway Edwards died peacefully, surrounded by family and friends at Vanderbilt University Medical Center; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Edwards was an immensely private man, who, while carefully guarding his personal time, managed to greatly enrich everyone he knew. For many years his name could be found on the short guest list for almost every significant public and private affair throughout the state, and, to those who knew him best, he was admired for his skill in being able to execute appearances and early departures from events with ease and grace, leaving many thankful they had spent time with him. His friends number in legions; and

WHEREAS, an imposing figure, Mr. Edwards stood at 6 feet 4 inches, and always dressed appropriately for the occasion, exuding great confidence, measured by a warm smile and a firm two-handed grip for both friend and stranger. His accomplishments span a lifetime. Oblivious to color or creed, Mr. Edwards holds the distinction of being a pioneer in overcoming racial barriers that existed in education and government; and

WHEREAS, born in Covington, Tennessee, in May of 1953 to Willie Artway Edwards and LaVerne Epps Edwards, Mr. Edwards received the first eleven years of his public education at Frazier High School, which was one of the historic Rosenwald Schools that were founded for

the purpose of providing educational opportunities to African American students during a time when public education funds were not readily provided for their education. Mr. Edwards received his early academic training from teachers including his neighbors, church members, relatives and mother who served on the faculty at Frazier High School; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Edwards graduated in 1971 from Covington High School's first racially integrated class, and later attended the University of Tennessee at Martin. There he became the most beloved figure on campus, familiar to all through his photography for the student yearbook, his tutoring and work in science laboratories, his leadership as a student government officer, and many other activities; and

WHEREAS, he served as a Student Counselor to the President of the UT system, and later became the first student administrative assistant to the Chancellor of UT-Martin. Mr. Edwards was nominated by fellow students to serve as the first student from UT-Martin and the second student ever on the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees. Mr. Edwards was the UT Board of Trustees' first African-American member; and

WHEREAS, after working for Congressman Ed Jones of Tennessee's 8<sup>th</sup> District, Mr. Edwards entered the world of business, starting and managing a computer services company in Knoxville. Mr. Edwards also held key management positions in the creation and execution of the successful 1982 World Fair; and

WHEREAS, in 1987, he was called into public service by Governor Ned McWherter, under whom he held positions of leadership, both in the Tennessee Department of Education and as Assistant Commissioner in the Tennessee Department of Labor. When Bill Purcell was elected Mayor of Nashville, Mr. Edwards was asked to serve as part of the city's economic development team. In 2000, Mr. Edwards served in the national headquarters as an advisor to the presidential campaign of Vice President Al Gore; and

WHEREAS, in recent years, Mr. Edwards served the current administration of Nashville Mayor Karl Dean with great distinction as the Executive Director of the Metropolitan Sports Authority, overseeing complex and challenging matters involving the Bridgestone Arena, LP Field and its tenants, including the NFL's Tennessee Titans and the NHL's Nashville Predators. He was greatly loved and admired by all who worked at both facilities; and

WHEREAS, no matter his official title, Emmett Edwards was in reality the Mayor of the Arena, and his people were the men and women who work at our sports venues and keep us safe at a game or event; he didn't hire them or necessarily have the ability to fire them, but he was their friend and advocate, and he wanted the best for them, and they knew it; and

WHEREAS, he was an extremely giving and compassionate gentleman, and Mr. Edwards' many kindnesses over the years to countless friends and associates have come to light in recent days as the news of his passing spread; and

WHEREAS, these include the following touching account of a very special man: "My daughter was in a school play a couple of years ago, and towards the end of the production, Emmett shows up, unannounced and unexpected. Shortly after the closing curtain, he presented her a bouquet of lovely flowers. It was a great moment, and she beamed with surprise and happiness. A classic Emmett touch. He was very kind and thoughtful in that way. Always."; and

WHEREAS, there were many others who shared similar thoughts and stories, ranging from text messages that came every Christmas Eve to the story of Emmett befriending a friend's wife for the first time at a stuffy political gathering where she knew no one else — and spending three hours sharing bread recipes; and

WHEREAS, an active member of his community, Mr. Edwards was involved in many other important civic and charitable causes over the years; and

WHEREAS, Emmett Edwards was also deeply devoted to his family, and he always endeavored to remain true to family values of the highest order; and

WHEREAS, preceded in death by his father, Willie Artway Edwards, Emmett Edwards is survived by his mother, LaVerne Epps Edwards, and his six siblings, Marsha Edwards (Washington, DC), Stella Edwards (San Antonio, Texas), William Edwards (Covington), Mattie (Andrew) Edwards Kemp (Portsmouth, Rhode Island), Lynda Edwards (Washington, DC), and Keith (Angel) Edwards (Cincinnati, Ohio); and

WHEREAS, he is also survived by his nephew Drew Kemp, his godson Ben Herron, and many others he considered family, including the children and grandchildren of his longtime

friend and companion Debbie Julianna, a strong, compassionate woman who was the light that held him to this earth in his final weeks of life; and

WHEREAS, throughout the years of his illustrious life, Emmett Edwards demonstrated the utmost professionalism, ability, and integrity, winning the unbridled respect and admiration of all who had the opportunity to know him; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional public servant and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Emmett Edwards, reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Mr. Edwards.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.